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Confessions, Covenants and Continuous Reformation in Early Modern Scotland

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Alasdair Raffe

- ¹ The swearing of collective religious covenants was a distinctive characteristic of post-Reformation Scotland. Members of other early modern societies thought that they were following in the footsteps of Old Testament Israel, and perceived themselves as in covenant with God. But early modern Scots took this idea particularly seriously, drawing up, expressing support for, and signing written covenants. Most of these documents shared some of the features of the confession of faith, that form of text, found across Reformation Europe, which was designed to codify and summarise religious truths. This was not because Scotland lacked its own confession. The Reformation parliament of August 1560 ratified a statement of Reformed beliefs, teaching a Calvinist understanding of the Eucharist, predestination of the Elect (but not of the reprobate) and the belief that the vigorous exercise of discipline was a mark of the true Church. This 'Scots Confession' was readopted by parliament after the abdication of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1567.¹ Nevertheless, the protestant principles of Scotland's religious leaders found further enunciation in a series of sworn engagements, generally composed in moments of crisis, when it was thought necessary to restate and elaborate the country's religious commitments. These documents did not aspire to the comprehensive doctrinal coverage of a confession of faith, and instead emphasised a smaller set of attitudes of particular salience at the time of writing. The Negative Confession of 1581, drawn up during an anti-Catholic panic, renounced the errors of the Roman Church. The National Covenant of 1638, a reaction to the innovative religious policies of Charles I, listed the numerous acts of parliament in favour of protestantism, as a means of endorsing the status quo. Then in 1643, the country made a further declaration of its religious principles in the Solemn League and Covenant, a religious oath in support of the military treaty then negotiated between Scotland and the English parliament. In 1648, after another upheaval, Scots

“renewed” the Solemn League and Covenant, by committing themselves to it again on a national basis. There were further occasions on which it was sworn, sometimes together with the National Covenant, by small minorities of the population, in 1666, 1689, 1712 and 1743. In each case, the participants formally acknowledged Scotland’s covenanted relationship with God, and pledged to strive once more for personal and collective reformation.

- 2 This article charts the origins of covenanting in Scotland, before analysing in more detail the successive renewals of the Covenants. The practice of entering into, in a collective ritual, solemn promises to uphold protestant principles ensured that covenanting created moments of heightened significance for devout Scots, and totemic dates for the country’s historians. In the nineteenth century, that great age of commemoration, the bicentenaries of the most important dates – 1638 and 1643 – were duly marked.² But the renewals of the Covenants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not so much commemorations as reaffirmations. Each time that groups of Scots expressed their approval of the Covenants, the specific contemporary contexts and purposes of the action were clear. Equally, however, those who swore committed themselves to what they saw as timeless religious truths, to continuing the struggle begun by their forebears against Catholic and episcopalian error. This article, then, investigates an aspect of the “long Reformation”: the gradual propagation of protestant ideas and identities over the century and more after 1560.³ It also seeks to understand the mentality of continuous Reformation – the endorsement and reiteration of protestant principles, the vigilance against sin and religious opponents, the necessity of changing one’s life – expressed by Scotland’s Covenants. The Covenants make particularly clear that the Reformation was not an event, but a process. It required the periodic restatement of doctrinal and constitutional claims, and also the continuing personal reformation of Christian men and women.

The Emergence of Covenanting, 1557-1643

- 3 What gave rise to the practice of covenanting in Scotland? Generations of historians have addressed this theme, and what follows is a brief sketch. Three developments were particularly significant. First, we should remember that the Scottish Reformation was the product of a rebellion against legitimate royal authority, in the person of the regent, Mary of Guise, who governed the country on behalf of her daughter, Mary, Queen of Scots. In 1559-60, the Lords of the Congregation, as the leading protestants were known, violently resisted the regent’s forces, before receiving English military support, overcoming the government and legislating for protestantism in the parliament of 1560.⁴ Because the regent opposed the Reformation movement, its early supporters found it necessary to agree to support and defend each other in the promotion of protestant teaching. Their promises of mutual assistance were registered in bonds of maintenance and friendship. These forms of engagement, which were common across late medieval Scotland, respectively recorded the pledges of lords to protect followers of lower social status, and of social equals to assist each other. By making use of these bonds, the Lords of the Congregation harnessed a documentary genre that had considerable authority in Scottish society.⁵ In the first of the explicitly religious bonds signed by the protestant nobility, dated 3 December 1557, five lords offered to protect “faithfull Ministeres” of the gospel.⁶ In the following five years there were four further religious bonds. As Jane

Dawson has pointed out, some of these documents employed language reminiscent of confessions of faith.⁷ In July 1567, after the turmoil leading to the abdication of Mary, Queen of Scots, the noblemen, lairds and ministers attending the Kirk's general assembly declared their willingness to "defend and mainteane to their uttermost" the outcomes of the Reformation parliament of 1560. The assembly's members then signed a copy of this and the meeting's other resolutions.⁸ In the making of the Scottish Reformation, therefore, the expression of religious allegiance and the confession of Reformed beliefs had become entwined with practices of collective swearing and mutual protection.

- 4 The second stage in the emergence of covenanting was the adoption of the Negative Confession. David Calderwood, the seventeenth-century presbyterian historian, called this statement of beliefs the "Secund Confessioun of Faith"; it stood in ideological continuity with the Scots Confession of 1560.⁹ It is sometimes called the "king's confession", reflecting its origins at the royal court. James VI, aged fourteen, had fallen under the political influence of his elder cousin, Esmé Stuart, earl of Lennox, after the overthrow of the last regent of the royal minority, James Douglas, earl of Morton. Lennox's French background and supposed attachment to Roman Catholicism led many ministers to suspect that he represented a plot to reverse the Reformation. Attempting to quell such fears, on 28 January 1581 James, Lennox and other courtiers swore the Negative Confession.¹⁰ Beginning with an endorsement of the protestantism of the Scots Confession, the Negative Confession then supplied a long list of Catholic beliefs and practices that subscribers claimed to "abhorre and detest". Lacking the systematic exposition of doctrines seen in the Scots Confession, the Negative Confession was written in the form of a public oath. It opened with the expression "We all, and ewerie one of ws wndervritten, protest", indicating that the text was designed to be signed. Moreover, it contained an explicit promise to defend the king's person, and invoked God as a witness to the subscribers' sincerity.¹¹ The Negative Confession underlined the connection that had appeared at the Reformation between collective swearing and the putting on record of protestant principles.
- 5 The Negative Confession was not only a political gesture by Scotland's rulers, but also an oath sworn widely by the people. On 2 March 1581, James signed an order requiring churchmen "to crave the same Confessione of their parishoners", and to punish those who refused to swear.¹² According to the seventeenth-century historian John Row, ministers "laboured diverse yeares to gett the oaths and subscriptions of all that would be rightlie informed by them, to stand to the said Confession of Faith unto their lives end".¹³ After the parliament of May 1584 legislated in favour of episcopacy and royal supremacy over the Church, some supporters of presbyterianism argued that the new laws were contrary to the principles upheld in the Negative Confession. Because they saw the Confession as a binding oath, sworn on a national basis, presbyterians such as Robert Bruce, James Carmichael and John Davidson began to conceive of the document as an expression of Scotland's covenant with God.¹⁴ Some of the promoters of this view were federal theologians, those divines who thought of the relationship between humanity and God in terms of the covenants of works and grace. But federal theology was not essential to the content of the Negative Confession or the Covenants that were its successors.¹⁵
- 6 Our third development, then, is the idea of a binding covenant. It came to be understood that such an engagement could be periodically renewed. In 1590, another anti-Catholic panic prompted the privy council to order the king's subjects to appear before commissioners and there "to giff the confessioun of thair faith". They were to sign a

written copy of their Confession, and also the new ‘general band’ that had been drawn up and sworn at court. Scots were being asked to assert their vigilance in the face of the Catholic Reformation and, it seems, again to add their names to copies of the Negative Confession.¹⁶ But if the procedure in 1590 suggests a fresh subscription drive, it soon became clear that renewing the covenant was not simply a matter of increasing the proportion of the population that had acknowledged the Negative Confession. More than this, swearing the covenant was an act of worship. In March 1596, the Church of Scotland’s general assembly heard a sermon from John Davidson, in which he urged ministers to repent of their sins. Calderwood’s narrative of the events continues:

When the brethrein were to dissolve, they were stayed by the moderator, and desired to hold up their hands to testifie their entering in a new league with God. They held up their hands presentlie. Manie were wonderfullie moved at the sight of so manie hands so readilie holdin up.

The assembly then instructed the Kirk’s synods, the regional courts, to repeat the ceremony.¹⁷ We have evidence that this was done in the synods of Perth and Stirling and Fife, but do not know how many other synods complied.¹⁸ James Melville, a minister who participated in Fife, explicitly described the process as “renewing the Covenant”.¹⁹ Like the assembly, the synod presented the action as a reaffirmation of the nation’s relationship with God, rather than recalling the precise details of the Negative Confession, which does not seem to have been read as part of the service.²⁰ Nevertheless, the ministers acted on the assumption that Scotland was in covenant with God, and that the promises made in 1581 and on other occasions were to be remembered.

- 7 These sixteenth-century developments made possible the National Covenant. Drawn up in February 1638, the Covenant was intended to give coherence to the opposition to Charles I, which had emerged from protests against the new Prayer Book he imposed in 1637. After being adopted by leading politicians in Edinburgh, the National Covenant was sworn in communities across Scotland.²¹ A lengthy document of over 4000 words, it comprised the text of the Negative Confession, followed by a catalogue of Scottish statutes in favour of the Reformed Church and against Catholicism and a band of mutual defence. Though the Covenant as sworn in February was ambiguous about Church government, in December the general assembly ruled that the document abjured episcopacy in favour of presbyterianism. In several places, the Covenant cited sixteenth-century precedents to justify an action that was in fact of dubious legality: the swearing of a national oath without royal permission. Thus the Covenant began by claiming legitimacy for the revival of the Negative Confession, noting that that declaration, having been sworn in 1581, was “subscribed againe by all sortis of persones in the yeir 1590 by a new ordinance of counsell at the desyre of the general assemblie”. The band in defence of religion and the king with which the Covenant concluded was “conforme to the practeise of the godly in former tymes”. Following “the laudable example of our worthie and religious progenitours”, its signatories would be replicating the subscription of the general band in 1590.²² As in that band, they promised to defend both protestantism and the king from their enemies. And as in 1596, the renewal of the Covenant in 1638 was an occasion of great religious significance. Through ritualised swearing, it bound Scots together, associating them with God and under God. 28 February 1638, on which date the expanded Covenant was first signed, was, in the words of its co-author, Archibald Johnston of Wariston, the “glorious mariage day of the Kingdome with God”.²³
- 8 The Solemn League and Covenant, agreed between representatives of the Covenanters and the English parliament in 1643, was a more innovative document. For the first time,

Scots entered a religious covenant designed to bind multiple kingdoms together. The Covenant insisted that the new alliance between the Scots and the English parliament was more than a military commitment, by calling for religious uniformity between the kingdoms.²⁴ The document's first clause pledged signatories to preserve the Church of Scotland, which the Covenanters had recently remodelled on presbyterian lines. The clause also sought the "reformatione of religioun" in England and Ireland "according to the word of God and the example of the best reformed churches". Given that the English Church retained bishops and a formal liturgy, there was clearly much to do. But reformation in Scotland was also understood as a work in progress. Not only did the Solemn League and Covenant demand the "extirpation" of sources of error and immorality ranging from popery to profanity, it also called for vigilance in the face of the "incendiaries, malignantes or evill instruments" thought to oppose reformation.²⁵ And in requiring personal reformation on the part of its signatories, the Solemn League and Covenant echoed the National Covenant. In the oath of 1638, Scots had promised "to be good examples to otheris of all godlines, sobernes and righteousness and of every dutie wee owght to God and man". Now those swearing the Solemn League and Covenant pledged to "amend" their lives, and "each one to goe before another in the example of a reall reformatioun".²⁶ The concept of religious reform expressed in these documents was both national and personal. The achievements of the past were to be defended, but Reformation also had a present and future. The National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant embodied a notion of continuous Reformation.

The National Renewal of the Solemn League and Covenant, 1648

- 9 The idea of a binding and perpetually significant national agreement with God, fidelity to which required constant effort and vigilance, led Scots to renew the Covenants on several occasions in the hundred years after 1643. The first such renewal took place in December 1648, setting a pattern for subsequent revivals of one or both of the mid-seventeenth-century oaths. The fresh adoption, in parishes across Scotland, of the Solemn League and Covenant followed a period of political turmoil. In December 1647, the earls of Lauderdale, Lanark and Loudoun, acting as Scottish commissioners in England, concluded an agreement, known as the Engagement, with Charles I. This document promised the king, then a prisoner of the English parliament at Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight, Scottish military assistance against his English opponents. In return, he undertook to establish presbyterianism in England for three years. The earls understood this as a step towards fulfilling the goals of the Solemn League and Covenant, but Charles refused either to swear that oath or to impose it on his English subjects.²⁷ When news of the Engagement reached Scotland, the commission of the general assembly, which managed the affairs of the Church between meetings of the full assembly, expressed its opposition to the agreement. The king's concessions in religious matters were insufficient, the churchmen argued, and the Engagement tended to assist the enemies of Reformation. There was no adequate justification for waging war against the English, with whom Scots remained in covenanted union. As far as the commission was concerned, the Engagement was in breach of the Solemn League and Covenant.²⁸
- 10 Though a substantial minority of leading Scots echoed the commission's criticisms of the Engagement, the Scottish parliament approved the agreement and made preparations for

an invasion of England. Led by the duke of Hamilton, the army of the Engagement marched south in July 1648. It was soundly beaten by English parliamentary forces at Preston in mid-August, whereupon Hamilton surrendered. The failure emboldened the opponents of the Engagement in Scotland, where a body of armed men marched from the south-west on Edinburgh, in the so-called “whiggamore raid”. The resulting coup, together with the intervention in its favour of Oliver Cromwell, who brought his army into Scotland in September, forced the supporters of the Engagement to relinquish power and disarm the soldiers remaining loyal to them. Cromwell left Scotland in October, and the victors of the whiggamore raid began to establish their authority, and to purge the Engagers from public office.

- 11 It was at this point that the commission of the general assembly ordered a nationwide renewal of the Solemn League and Covenant.²⁹ In an act dated 6 October 1648, the commission instructed ministers to hold days of fasting in their parishes on Thursday 14 and Sunday 17 December, and on the latter to read the Covenant and ask the people to engage themselves to it. As well as providing an opportunity for those too young to swear in 1643-1644, the action would remind Scots of the religious obligations expressed in the Covenants. It would also establish dividing lines between those who could be reconciled to the new regime and those who were to be excluded from influence. Scots guilty of various forms of compliance with the Engagement were not to be allowed to swear the Covenant or to receive communion thereafter.³⁰
- 12 No change was made to the text of the Solemn League and Covenant as composed in 1643. But the commission drew up a supplementary document, which was to be read to the people as part of the renewal process. Called *A Solemn Acknowledgment of Public Sins and Breaches of the Covenants and a Solemn Engagement to all the Duties therein*, the new text vindicated the commission's opposition to the Engagement and expanded on the promises made in the Covenant. Among many breaches of the Covenants, the Acknowledgement of Sins objected to the war against England, and complained that the “Malignant party is still numerous” and plotting further war, to the likely destruction of unity within Scotland and between the kingdoms. The Scottish commissioners in England had walked unfaithfully in the Covenants, and had not acted to preserve the liberty of parliaments, as promised in the Solemn League. Too little was done to discover and punish the opponents of covenanted Reformation. Fundamentally, the Acknowledgement continued, Scots had not changed their lives religiously and morally, by receiving Christ in their hearts and ceasing to sin. “[W]e have refused to be reformed”, it lamented. Thus the Acknowledgement urged those who heard it read to be steadfast in the duties expressed in the Covenants. It was a reminder that Reformation was a continuous process, requiring unalterable commitment.³¹
- 13 The Acknowledgement also provided justifications for swearing the Solemn League and Covenant again. The action was “warranted by the word of God”, and by the “example of Gods people of old”: Old Testament Israel. There was also the “practise of our predecessours” in 1596, when the church courts, and “many of the Nobility, Gentry and Burgesses, did with many tears acknowledge before God the breach of the Nationall Covenant, and ingaged themselves to a Reformation”. This earlier renewal was said to have followed the precedent set by the general assembly in 1567.³² As in 1638, the swearing of a collective oath was not to be seen as an aberration, even if it occurred in response to political instability. Rather, it was part of the cyclical history of the Scottish Reformation. When the continuous process of reforming the country and its people

slowed, or came under threat, it was necessary to reaffirm the nation's commitment to protestantism in a Covenant with God.

- 14 The commission hoped that the swearing of the Solemn League and Covenant would set the tone for the new radical regime, encouraging it to promote godliness and suppress sin. Partly because there was considerable overlap between the lay membership of the commission and that of the parliament of 1649, there was soon a body of new laws agreeable to the zealous. These included the act of classes, which excluded Engagers from office, statutes against moral offences such as fornication, swearing and drunkenness, and measures of presbyterian reform in the Church, notably the statutory ratification of the 1646 Westminster Confession of faith.³³ Furthermore, the pressure for moral reform contributed to a great increase in the prosecution of witches, who were thought to enter a covenant with the devil, subverting personal and national promises to God.³⁴ But while these developments accorded with the principles of the Covenants, it is difficult to specify what difference renewing the Solemn League and Covenant made. If swearing the oaths again gave the regime's supporters unity and determination, it is questionable how long such an effect could be sustained. The radicals' obsession with purging "malignants" from civil and military office – in line with the Solemn League and Covenant – served Scotland ill at the battle of Dunbar of 3 September 1650, when a Scottish army denuded of some of its experienced officers was defeated by Cromwell's English forces.³⁵ The subsequent English invasion was a decisive blow against the alliance first agreed in 1643. But it did not terminate the commitment of many Scots to the Covenants.

Presbyterian Rebellion and the Renewal of the Covenant, 1666

- 15 When the Solemn League and Covenant was next renewed, it was in circumstances quite different to those of 1648. Presbyterianism was no longer the established Church polity, the government had repudiated the Covenants, and the oaths were now the badge of an oppressed minority. After the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the government overturned the outcomes of the Covenanting revolution of 1638-1641. In January 1661, parliament passed an act declaring that the convening of subjects and making of leagues without royal authority was illegal. Building on this position, parliament then adopted a measure denying that the Solemn League and Covenant had any binding force, and warning Scots not to attempt to renew it. Holders of public office were required to swear declarations against the Covenants, stating that only the king could authorise bands among his subjects and leagues with foreign nations. The National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant, made without royal permission, were thus "unlawfull oaths".³⁶ Supporters of the government depicted the Covenants as seditious engagements, in which religious zeal was harnessed cynically for political ends. These critics of the Covenants could argue that God, by allowing the English invasion of Scotland in 1650-1651, had punished the nation for its rebellion. It was time to abandon the Covenants and return to true obedience to the king.³⁷
- 16 But many Scots believed that the country remained in covenant with God whatever the king and parliament said. For those who held this view, it was the crown's decision in 1661-1662 to restore episcopacy in the Church of Scotland that was unlawful.³⁸ Swearers of the Covenants had expressed their abhorrence of government by bishops and promised

to extirpate “prelacie”. Now the government required them to attend services in a Church run by bishops. A deep-rooted commitment to the Covenants, together with the ejection of hundreds of presbyterian ministers from their parishes for refusing to accept the settlement, gave rise to widespread religious nonconformity after 1662, especially in the south of Scotland. The government responded coercively, levying fines for absence from church, and empowering soldiers to collect them.³⁹ In November 1666, this policy provoked a violent reaction, first taking the form of localised acts of resistance in Kirkcudbrightshire, then evolving into an armed rising in defence of presbyterianism. Having seized Sir James Turner, lieutenant-colonel of the government troops, at Dumfries, the insurgents moved into Ayrshire, before marching north-east towards Edinburgh. But the presbyterian force was never strong enough to threaten the capital, and the royal army crushed the rising on 28 November at Rullion Green in the Pentland Hills, ten miles south of the city.⁴⁰

- 17 Participants in the rising insisted that they did not seek to overturn legitimate political authority, but fought only for the restoration of presbyterianism as required by the Covenants. At Dumfries, the presbyterian insurgents drank the king’s health at the town cross, so as to assert their loyalty. In the words of James Kirkton, a presbyterian historian writing three decades later, this was “a labour they might well have spared, for they had cruel thanks”.⁴¹ Nevertheless, it was not an empty gesture. Turner recalled that John Welsh, one of the leading presbyterian ministers, prayed explicitly for Charles II.⁴² Most of the presbyterians captured on the battlefield and subsequently executed for treason protested their loyalty to the king.⁴³
- 18 More important as an expression of their beliefs, however, was the presbyterians’ ceremony of Covenant renewal, which took place at Lanark on 26 November. After the insurgents arrived there on the evening of the 25th, their leaders communicated to the townspeople that “to-morrow morning (God willing) we intended to renew the covenant”.⁴⁴ In the morning, on learning that the government’s troops were nearby, the presbyterians considered abandoning the renewal. But it took place as planned, with the foot soldiers and horse assembling as two congregations in different parts of the town. Each group of soldiers heard one or two ministers preach and then read the Solemn League and Covenant, before holding their hands up to affirm their commitment to its principles.⁴⁵ Probably the Solemn League was used because it was much shorter than the National Covenant, was seen as fully in accordance with the earlier oath, and provided a particularly clear statement of the duty to oppose episcopacy. There was perhaps not time at Lanark for a recitation of both mid-seventeenth-century Covenants, let alone for a revival or modification of the Acknowledgement of Sins and Engagement to Duties.
- 19 By renewing the Solemn League and Covenant, the presbyterian forces clarified the principles for which they were fighting. Probably the rising’s leaders hoped that the action would gain fresh recruits for their cause. According to Kirkton, the insurgents believed that swearing the Covenant would win favour in Lanark, whose inhabitants were generally sympathetic to presbyterianism. But “few or none of the town joyned with them” in the ceremony, “such a terror there was upon the spirits, even of their greatest friends”. Nevertheless, Kirkton recorded that the sermon given on the occasion by Gabriel Semple may have induced a few to join the campaign.⁴⁶ Indeed, the sources report that the presbyterian forces reached their greatest number at Lanark, and were at their “most resolute”.⁴⁷ Covenanting had fulfilled its traditional function of giving some unity and purpose to a body of armed men, who stood ready to fight for their beliefs. And the

renewal of the Solemn League and Covenant provided a vindication for the presbyterians in their defeat. As one of the captured participants declared, in his last testimony before execution, “I am condemned to die for adhering to my Covenant made with God, for Reformation of Religion and Conversation, to which all ranks of the Land are as well bound as I”.⁴⁸

The Cameronians and the Covenants, 1689-1712

- 20 Throughout the Restoration period, the government and its supporters continued to regard the Covenants as illegal oaths and their adherents as potential rebels. After the accession of James VII in 1685, parliament passed an act stating that “giving or taking of” the National Covenant or the Solemn League and Covenant, writing in their defence or “owning of them as lawfull or obligatory” were acts of treason.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, presbyterian dissenters remained committed to the Covenants. Particularly vehement in the cause of Scotland’s national oaths were the United Societies, a small group of radicals who separated themselves from the mainstream nonconformists after the defeat of the presbyterian rising of 1679. The Societies, who were also known as “Cameronians” after their early leader Richard Cameron, renounced their allegiance to Charles II and James VII, and continued in the face of militarised government opposition to worship in large, outdoor gatherings.⁵⁰ The invasion of England in late 1688 by Prince William of Orange, and the resulting collapse of James VII’s regime in Scotland, placed the group’s members in a quandary. On the one hand, it looked possible that whatever government emerged from the revolutionary overthrow of King James would re-establish presbyterianism in Scotland. Moderate Cameronians were prepared to espouse William’s cause; the Societies’ preacher William Boyd took part in a public reading of the Prince’s *Declaration* of reasons for his invasion. More hard-line figures in the Societies considered such actions a form of sinful association with men who had neither subscribed the Covenants nor supported the oaths’ objectives of further Reformation.⁵¹ Nevertheless, many members of the Societies took part in crowd disturbances that furthered William’s interest, destroying Catholic chapels and intimidating the supporters of James. Particularly unsettling for the extremists was the role of armed members of the Societies in protecting the convention of estates that met in Edinburgh in March to resolve the crisis. Thereafter a Cameronian regiment was formed, which helped the forces of the newly enthroned William to defeat a Jacobite rising against his rule in the summer of 1689.⁵²
- 21 It is in the context of revolutionary upheaval and divisions within the United Societies that we should understand the group’s decision to renew the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant. After disagreeing about the wisdom of supporting William of Orange, the Societies’ general meeting of January 1689 “unanimously concluded” that “it was a necessary duty to renew the covenants”.⁵³ The date chosen for the action was Sunday 3 March, in advance of the meeting of the convention of estates and thus before the formulation of a revolutionary settlement. It would, the clerk of the general meeting recorded, “not be so proper for us” to renew the Covenants “as in this interregnum, and time of anarchy”.⁵⁴ A narrative of the action, published for the Societies after the event, explained that the renewal “was without Authority, yet it was not against Authority, being in the time of the *Interregnum*, before the settlement of *Authority*”. Nevertheless, the narrative justified entering into covenants without royal permission, referring to the bands of the Lords of the Congregation, the signing of the National Covenant in 1638, and

to Lanark in 1666, when “a small handful of honest and faithful patriots renewed the Solemn League also, without and against the Authority that was then”.⁵⁵ As the location for the ceremony, the Societies selected remote Borland Hill in the Lanarkshire parish of Lesmahagow, “lest being too public it should be opposed”.⁵⁶ Despite this caution, the renewal of the Covenants could be seen as one of the Societies’ several initiatives to influence the outcome of the revolution, a programme that also included the forcible ejection of episcopalian ministers from parishes across southern Scotland. Adding to this direct action against the Restoration Church, the Cameronians must have hoped that the revival of the Covenants would promote the cause of a presbyterian settlement. It might have served, the narrative of the event remarked, “to revive the memory of” the Covenants, and “at least to break the ice for others to renew them more Solemnly”.⁵⁷

- 22 Unlike the presbyterians of 1648 and 1666, the Societies explicitly endorsed both the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant. The Societies’ minister Thomas Linning read the two documents to the people assembled on 3 March, though he apparently omitted the lists of statutes in the National Covenant.⁵⁸ Both Covenants were published in full in the narrative of the renewal. Minor revisions to the texts were made, in a few places because the original wording was inapplicable to current circumstances, but mostly to indicate that the Societies thought that there was, in March 1689, no reigning monarch to whom allegiance was owed. Thus references in the original documents to the “king” were carefully replaced with “the government” or the “civil magistrate”.⁵⁹
- 23 In a further attempt to act on precedents, the Societies revived and updated the Acknowledgement of Sins and Engagement to Duties issued in 1648. Doing so allowed them to appropriate the legacy of the radical Covenanters of 1648, and to give legitimacy to their own interpretation of the religious politics of the Restoration period, a reading unacceptable to more moderate presbyterians. Though the version of the Acknowledgement and Engagement the Cameronians used was recognisably based on the original, they reordered material and made substantial additions, as well as small alterations.⁶⁰ The more minor changes, which often shifted verbs from the present to the past tense, tended to suggest that the sins and defections specific to 1648 were to be mourned in 1689, but not to be blamed on those alive at the latter date. On the other hand, the revisers of the document drew parallels and continuities between the faults of the 1640s and those of more recent years. The updated Acknowledgement prefaced a passage from the 1648 text about invasions of the liberties of parliaments (warned against in the Solemn League and Covenant’s third article) by recording that “our Fathers found reason to complain”. But, the 1689 version continued, “So, in our day”, parliaments “have had rather the name and shew, than the real Power and Priviledges” of lawful assemblies of the estates.⁶¹ Not only were many of the same abuses visible in 1689 as in 1648, but the same remedy – swearing the Covenants and engaging to the duties they entailed – was required. The Cameronians showed themselves the true heirs of the Covenanters of 1648, and the most faithful of presbyterians in 1689.
- 24 Probably swearing Scotland’s engagements afresh generated a greater sense of unity among the Cameronians. As in 1648, the renewal was preceded by a day of fasting, which was intended to allow members of the Societies to reflect on personal and national breaches of the Covenants, and to recall the duties imposed by the oaths. On 3 March itself, Linning, after preaching to the large congregation, read from a paper the names of members who wished to confess their sins – relating to their compliance with the

Restoration regime or extremism in nonconformity – before swearing the Covenants. When called, these individuals stood and showed that they regretted their former behaviour. This was evidently a cathartic exercise, for Cameronians who had not previously notified Linning of their intention to confess sins started to do so. “[M]any throughout that great confluence stood up uncalled”, wrote the minister Alexander Shields, “and cried, on all hands, ‘I am guilty’ of such and such ane oath, and bond, &c.; and could hardly be restrained”, until Linning “discharged any more to rise”.⁶² Though Shields recorded that not everyone present held up a hand when the Covenants were read to show approval of the oaths, the day’s ceremony was clearly designed to overcome former divisions among the Cameronians and incite a feeling of shared commitment to further Reformation.

- 25 In fact, the Cameronians were not able to forget their differences. In 1690, the group experienced a major schism when its three preachers and many lay members reconciled themselves to the Church of Scotland, now re-established on a presbyterian basis. The more radical Cameronians refused to acknowledge either the Kirk or the “uncovenanted” King William, and continued as a network of lay prayer societies until 1706, when John Macmillan, a minister ejected from the establishment for his dissident opinions, became their preacher. Though Macmillan’s early work among the Societies was limited to preaching, conducting marriages and baptisms, members longed for the day when they would again renew the Covenants and celebrate communion.⁶³ These actions were finally accomplished in July 1712, at Auchensaugh in the Lanarkshire parish of Douglas.⁶⁴
- 26 On one level, the Societies’ renewal of the Covenants in 1712 was a response to the major political developments of early eighteenth-century Scotland. The Anglo-Scottish union of 1707 was an affront to many presbyterians. Because the union subjected Scotland to a British parliament of which the Anglican bishops were members, its presbyterian critics saw it as a breach of both Covenants. Rather than extirpating episcopacy in the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant, the union secured the position of the bishops, while creating a British union based not on religious uniformity, but on two distinct established Churches. In 1712, moreover, the new British parliament further alienated presbyterian hard-liners by making substantial reforms to Scottish religious life, particularly by granting toleration of episcopalian nonconformity.⁶⁵ In these circumstances, there were many new public sins to be acknowledged and regretted in the process of swearing the Covenants. The United Societies adapted the Acknowledgement of Sins and Engagement to Duties of 1648, making very significant additions to the version of 1689.⁶⁶ As the account of the renewal published for the Societies explained, the revised Acknowledgement adjusted “the Articles of the Covenant to the Circumstances of the Time”, explaining “in what Sense the Covenant binds us against the present Evils, that are now prevalent in the Land, and to the contrary Duties”.⁶⁷ Among numerous complaints about the government’s religious policies and the Kirk’s reactions to them since 1690, the Acknowledgement lamented that “most of the three Kingdoms” had joined “in one great Combination against” covenanted Reformation, through “this Cope-stone of Defection, this *Incorporating Union*”. In the Engagement to Duties, the new text asserted that the Societies would “always desire and Pray for the reviving of the Work of Uniformity in the three Kingdoms”.⁶⁸ In these hopes, the Societies were joined by many other Scottish presbyterians, within and on the fringes of the Kirk. Though the Societies were small in number, their ideological influence was considerable, and their willingness to assert traditional presbyterian principles won them widespread sympathy.⁶⁹

- 27 As well as continuing the Cameronian tradition of protest against the illegitimate authority and policies of Britain's monarchs, the Societies were inevitably attempting to instil a fresh sense of solidarity and purpose. Macmillan and his associates admitted that the Societies were "a poor insignificant Handful of People." Without the concurrence of Church and State, a Covenant cannot be taken or renewed Nationally, speaking strictly. "Yet a few may publicly declare their Adherence to their Covenant Engagements by Renewing them, not only without the Consent and concurrence of Authority but against it". They were "unworthy indeed to be called the Posterity of our Zealous Reforming Ancestors", but the Societies were "heartily desirous to be found Adherers to the same Standart of Doctrine, Worship, Dicipline and Government to which they adhered".⁷⁰ If this suggests that members of the Societies thought that no evolution in presbyterian principles had occurred since 1638, the updated Acknowledgement and Engagement made clear that the current circumstances were quite different to those of the 1640s. Nevertheless, the Societies of 1712, like their predecessors in 1689, hoped to claim for themselves the legacy of the Covenanting revolution. Moreover, the Societies were consciously following the practice of 1648 when they decided to make accession to the Covenants a term of communion in the group.⁷¹ Having renewed the Covenants on Thursday 24 July, the assembled congregation celebrated the Lord's Supper on Sunday 27th, with Macmillan explicitly barring opponents of the Covenants from communicating.
- ⁷² Renewing the Covenants became a shibboleth, a marker of exclusivity that set the United Societies apart from other presbyterians. In spite of this, the group plausibly claimed to represent continuity with the Covenanting past, and to be the conscience of Scottish presbyterianism. Despite the re-establishment of presbyterianism in 1690, many Scots believed, the Kirk was no longer committed to continuous Reformation. In 1712, Macmillan and the Societies spoke most clearly for this tradition.

The Seceders and the Eighteenth-Century Uses of the Covenants

- 28 In the eighteenth century as a whole, only a minority of Scots swore the Covenants, even if a much larger body of the population thought that the national oaths were binding. In the 1730s, a new claimant to the legacy of the Covenants emerged in the form of the Secession Church, which split from the Church of Scotland after a dispute over lay patronage and theological change.⁷³ In 1743, the Associate Presbytery, as the Seceders were officially known, resolved to renew the Covenants.⁷⁴ As in 1689 and 1712, this action would allow a marginal presbyterian group to assert legitimacy by expressing its commitment to the Covenanting tradition. By swearing the Covenants, moreover, the Seceders, who upheld Calvinist orthodoxy and presbyterian ecclesiology, could position themselves as distinct from liberalising tendencies in the Kirk and from the influential episcopalian evangelical George Whitefield, who had recently been active in Scotland.⁷⁵ As with the Societies in 1712, however, the Seceders' renewal of the Covenants would also make the new Church more exclusive, particularly once the Presbytery had resolved that swearing the Covenants would be a term of communion.⁷⁶
- 29 The ministers of the Associate Presbytery swore the Covenants in a ceremony at Stirling on 28 December 1743. It was only after this event that lay members were required to take the oaths.⁷⁷ The Seceders departed in other important ways from the pattern of Covenant renewal seen in 1689 and 1712. Though they set out to revive the National Covenant, as

well as the Solemn League and Covenant, the Seceders swore only the Negative Confession of 1581, omitting the lists of statutes and the civil bond devised in 1638.⁷⁸ Presumably neither the legislation relating to the established Church of Scotland nor the parts of the Covenant concerning resistance to Charles I seemed relevant to the Seceders' purposes in 1743. Furthermore, the Associate Presbytery adopted a completely new Acknowledgement of Sins and Engagement of Duties, together with a new bond testifying their commitment to the principles of the Covenants. These documents did much to emphasise the mid-eighteenth-century context of the renewal. Though the Acknowledgement referred back to the errors of the 1650s and the Restoration period, it was largely concerned with the faults of the Church since the revolution of 1688-1690. It reflected the attitudes expressed in the *Testimony* the Associate Presbytery had issued in 1734 in justification of the Secession.⁷⁹ Without modifying the doctrines of the Covenants, then, the Seceders adapted them to the eighteenth-century purpose of building a new denomination.

- 30 At the same time, however, the Seceders remained committed to the old ideas of continuous Reformation. Their newly composed bond not only testified their adherence to the Reformed religion and presbyterian government, but also expressed a resolve to reform their own lives. And it pledged, in line with the Solemn League and Covenant, if not with the realm of the politically possible in the 1740s, that its swearers would “endeavour the Reformation of Religion in *England* and *Ireland*, in Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government, according to the Word of God”.⁸⁰ The leading Seceders acknowledged that their renewal took place in the centenary year of the Solemn League and Covenant. In his sermon preached at the ceremony in Stirling, Ralph Erskine remarked that, in the ministers' action, “God hath begun to set up a Memorial” to the “Reformation-Work” effected in 1643 and thereafter by “solemn Covenanting”.⁸¹ But this was no commemoration in the nineteenth-century fashion. Rather, the Seceders participated in what was both a reaffirmation of traditional principles, and a re-appropriation of familiar practices. The goal was not to historicise the Covenants, to understand them in seventeenth-century context, but to resituate them and their concept of Reformation in the eighteenth century.

Conclusion

- 31 Before the Covenants became the subjects of commemoration – before the Scottish Reformation was understood as an event located securely in the past – many Scots believed that these national oaths were of undiminishing importance.⁸² By the time of the Seceders' renewal, indeed, at least one outspoken critic of national covenanting had emerged from within the Kirk: John Glas, minister of Tealing, Angus, and founder of the Independent denomination called the Glasites or Sandemanians. He rejected the concept of a national Church, arguing that the Covenants of Old Testament Israel and the Church-state they constituted had no equivalent in Christian societies.⁸³ Subsequently, more and more ministers, though committed to the national Church, were ambivalent about the legacy of the Covenants.⁸⁴ But for ordinary Scots in the eighteenth century, especially in the south of the country, the Covenants remained a vital component of religious identity.⁸⁵ This was partly because the oaths stood for Scottish confessional distinctiveness, and perhaps for a sense of national independence, in the disorienting post-union world.⁸⁶ For “as long as *Scotland* is *Scotland*, and *God* is *Unchangeable*”, the preacher at the renewal in

1689 put it, Scots were obliged to defend the country's "Reformation in Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government".⁸⁷ As this phrasing suggests, the Covenants could inspire popular demonstrations; their legacy was even co-opted by the political reform movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁸⁸

- 32 But it was also important that the Covenants enshrined timeless truths. As protestants had insisted since the Reformation, Catholicism was riddled with errors. It was not the promise in the Negative Confession to "abhor" popery that made this so. Likewise, eighteenth-century ministers continued to teach that presbyterianism was Christ's government of his Church, whatever their views about the validity of the Covenants. As the Cameronian preacher in 1689 put it, the Covenants contained "nothing but what is antecedently and eternally binding, albeit there had never been a formal Covenant".⁸⁹ This meant that, for devout Scots, the duties of continuous Reformation – the restatement of protestant principles on a national level, the war against sin in communities, the reformation of individual morality – were unceasing. There were particular circumstances in which presbyterian minorities renewed the Covenants; to do so was to claim legitimacy and to gain collective purpose. But the oaths were obligatory, regardless of when they were last sworn. It was this understanding that delayed the memorialisation of Scotland's Covenants, ensuring that the country had among the longest of long Reformations.

NOTES

1. *Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, ed. Keith M. Brown et al., <http://www.rps.ac.uk> [hereafter RPS], A1560/8/3, A1567/12/3. For an edition, see *Scots Confession, 1560 (Confessio Scoticana) and Negative Confession, 1581 (Confessio Negativa)*, ed. G. D. Henderson, Edinburgh, 1937. For commentary, see W. Ian P. Hazlett, "The Scots Confession 1560: context, complexion and critique", *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 78, 1987, p. 287-320.
2. James J. Coleman, *Remembering the Past in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Commemoration, Nationality and Memory*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014, see esp. ch. 4.
3. See John McCallum (ed.), *Scotland's Long Reformation: New Perspectives on Scottish Religion, c. 1500-c. 1660*, Leiden, Brill, 2016.
4. For an introduction to these events, see Jane E. A. Dawson, *Scotland Re-formed, 1488-1587*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, ch. 9.
5. The classic analysis is Jenny Wormald, *Lords and Men in Scotland: Bonds of Manrent, 1442-1603*, Edinburgh, John Donald, 1985.
6. John Knox, *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing, 6 vols., Edinburgh, Wodrow Society, 1846-1864, VI, p. 674-675, quotation at p. 674.
7. J. Wormald, *op. cit.*, p. 410-412; Jane E. A. Dawson, "Bonding, religious allegiance and covenanting", in Steve Boardman and Julian Goodare (eds.), *Kings, Lords and Men in Scotland and Britain, 1300-1625: Essays in Honour of Jenny Wormald*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014, p. 155-172, here at p. 162, 167.
8. David Calderwood, *History of the Kirk of Scotland*, ed. Thomas Thomson, 8 vols, Edinburgh, Wodrow Society, 1845, II, p. 378-383, quotation at p. 379. The Reformation parliament's acts were

ratified in the parliament of December 1567. See Alan R. MacDonald, *The Jacobean Kirk, 1567-1625: Sovereignty, Polity and Liturgy*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1998, p. 6-7.

9. D. Calderwood, *op. cit.*, III, p. 502.

10. The Confession's context is introduced in J. Dawson, *op. cit.*, p. 306-309. See also A. MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 18-21.

11. John Row, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland, from the Year 1558 to August 1637*, ed. David Laing, Edinburgh, Wodrow Society, 1842, p. 74-77, here at p. 74.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

14. Arthur H. Williamson, *Scottish National Consciousness in the Age of James VI: The Apocalypse, the Union and the Shaping of Scotland's Public Culture*, Edinburgh, John Donald, 1979, p. 68-73; David G. Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism, 1590-1638*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 182-184.

15. D. Mullan, *op. cit.*, ch. 6. See also S. A. Burrell, "The apocalyptic vision of the early Covenanters", *Scottish Historical Review*, 43, 1964, p. 1-24; John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 165-168.

16. *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, 1st ser., ed. John H. Burton and David Masson, 14 vols, Edinburgh, H. M. General Register House, 1877-1898, IV, p. 463-467, quotations at p. 467; Calderwood, *History*, V, p. 37-52; *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies of the Kirk of Scotland*, 3 vols, Glasgow, Maitland Club, 1839-1845, II, p. 748.

17. D. Calderwood, *op. cit.*, V, p. 406-8, quotation at p. 407.

18. A. MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

19. *The Autobiography and Diary of Mr James Melville*, ed. Robert Pitcairn, Edinburgh, Wodrow Society, 1842, p. 346 (quotation), 353-357, 360-362.

20. See D. Mullan, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

21. Among other discussions, see Laura A. M. Stewart, *Rethinking the Scottish Revolution: Covenanted Scotland, 1637-1651*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, see esp. ch. 1-2; John Morrill (ed.), *The Scottish National Covenant in its British Context*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1990; David Stevenson, *The Scottish Revolution, 1637-1644: The Triumph of the Covenanters*, Newton Abbot, David & Charles, 1973, see esp. ch. 2.

22. Quotations from the National Covenant as in RPS, 1640/6/36.

23. *Diary of Sir Archibald Johnston of Wariston, 1632-1639*, ed. George Morison Paul, Edinburgh, Scottish History Society, 1911, p. 322.

24. See e.g. Edward J. Cowan, "The Solemn League and Covenant", in Roger A. Mason (ed.), *Scotland and England, 1286-1815*, Edinburgh, John Donald, 1987, p. 182-202; D. Stevenson, *op. cit.*, ch. 9.

25. Quotations from the Solemn League and Covenant as in RPS, 1644/6/147.

26. RPS, 1640/6/36, 1644/6/147.

27. For various perspectives on the events described in this and the following paragraphs, see L. Stewart, *op. cit.*, esp. ch. 6; Allan I. Macinnes, *The British Confederate: Archibald Campbell, Marquess of Argyll, c. 1607-1661*, Edinburgh, John Donald, 2011, esp. ch. 9; David Stevenson, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Scotland, 1644-1651*, London, Royal Historical Society, 1977, esp. ch. 3 and 4.

28. *A Declaration of the Commissioners of the Generall Assembly, to the Whole Kirk and Kingdome of Scotland*, Edinburgh, Evan Tyler, 1648; *The Records of the Commissions of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland holden in Edinburgh in the Years 1646 and 1647*, ed. Alexander F. Mitchell and James Christie, Edinburgh, Scottish History Society, 1892, esp. p. 403-5.

29. The event is scarcely discussed in the main histories of the period. But see John R. Young, "Scottish Covenanting radicalism, the commission of the Kirk and the establishment of the parliamentary radical regime of 1648-1649", *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 25, 1993-1995, p. 342-375, here at p. 349; L. Stewart, *Rethinking the Scottish Revolution*, p. 101.

30. *The Records of the Commissions of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland holden in Edinburgh the Years 1648 and 1649*, ed. Alexander F. Mitchell and James Christie, Edinburgh, Scottish History Society, 1896, p. 78-80, 136-139; Natalie Mears et al. (eds.), *National Prayers: Special Worship since the Reformation: Volume 1: Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings in the British Isles, 1533-1688*, Woodbridge, Church of England Record Society, 2013, p. 494-495. On the exclusion of Scots from communion for political reasons in this period, see Chris R. Langley, "A sweet love-token betwixt Christ and his Church: Kirk, communion and the search for further Reformation, 1646-1658", in McCallum (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 88-111.
31. *A Solemn Acknowledgment of Public Sins and Breaches of the Covenants and a Solemn Engagement to all the Duties therein*, Edinburgh, Evan Tyler, 1648, quotations at p. 2, 9.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.
33. Young, "Scottish Covenanting radicalism", esp. p. 353-354; RPS, 1649/1/43, 1649/1/63, 1649/1/119, 1649/1/78a.
34. Paula Hughes, "The 1649-50 Scottish Witch-Hunt, with Particular Reference to the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale", University of Strathclyde PhD thesis, 2008, esp. p. 24.
35. John D. Grainger, *Cromwell against the Scots: The Last Anglo-Scottish War, 1650-1652*, East Linton, Tuckwell Press, 1997, p. 29, 40-50; D. Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p. 148-149.
36. RPS, 1661/1/23, 1661/1/36, 1661/1/88, 1662/5/70 (quotation).
37. Alasdair Raffe, *The Culture of Controversy: Religious Arguments in Scotland, 1660-1714*, Woodbridge, Boydell, 2012, p. 69-70. On the various oaths against the Covenants, see also Alasdair Raffe, "Scottish state oaths and the revolution of 1688-1690", in Sharon Adams and Julian Goodare (eds.), *Scotland in the Age of Two Revolutions*, Woodbridge, Boydell, 2014, p. 173-191.
38. On the restoration of episcopacy, see e.g. Alasdair Raffe, "Presbyterian politics and the restoration of Scottish episcopacy, 1660-1662", in N. H. Keeble (ed.), *"Settling the Peace of the Church": 1662 Revisited*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 144-167; Tim Harris, *Restoration: Charles II and his Kingdoms*, London, Allen Lane, 2005, p. 112-116.
39. See e.g. Elizabeth Hannan Hyman, "A Church militant: Scotland, 1661-1690", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 26, 1995, p. 49-74; Ian B. Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters, 1660-1688*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1976, see esp. ch. 3.
40. In addition to I. Cowan, *op. cit.*, see Charles Sanford Terry, *The Pentland Rising & Rullion Green*, Glasgow, James MacLehose and Sons, 1905, esp. ch. 4.
41. James Kirkton, *A History of the Church of Scotland, 1660-1679*, ed. Ralph Stewart, Lewiston, NY, Edwin Mellen, 1992, p. 133.
42. Sir James Turner, *Memoirs of his own Life and Times*, Edinburgh, Bannatyne Club, 1829, p. 157.
43. [James Steuart and James Stirling,] *Naphtali, or, the Wrestlings of the Church of Scotland for the Kingdom of Christ*, 1667, e.g. p. 216, 221, 226-227, 229.
44. James Wallace, "Narrative of the rising at Pentland", in Thomas M'Crie (ed.), *Memoirs of Mr. William Veitch, and George Brysson*, Edinburgh, W. Blackwood, 1825, p. 388-432, quotation at p. 404.
45. J. Wallace, "Narrative", p. 405; J. Turner, *Memoirs*, p. 169; J. Kirkton, *History*, p. 137; Andrew Crichton, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Blackader*, 2nd edn., Edinburgh, William Tait, 1826, p. 124. Most of the sources describing the event refer ambiguously to the renewal of the "covenant", but one clarifies that it was specifically the Solemn League and Covenant that was read and approved; [Steuart and Stirling,] *op. cit.*, p. 140.
46. J. Kirkton, *History*, p. 137.
47. J. Turner, *Memoirs*, p. 170; A. Crichton, *Memoirs of Blackader*, p. 124.
48. [Steuart and Stirling,] *op. cit.* p. 249.
49. RPS, 1685/4/22.
50. For more detail, see I. Cowan, *op. cit.*, chapter 7 and 8; Mark Jardine, "The United Societies: Militancy, Martyrdom and the Presbyterian Movement in Late-Restoration Scotland, 1679 to 1688", University of Edinburgh PhD thesis, 2009.

51. M. Jardine, *op. cit.*, p. 233-4, 239-40.
52. For more information about the course of the revolution in Scotland, see Alasdair Raffe, *Scotland in Revolution, 1685-1690*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming 2018, esp. ch. 5-6.
53. [Michael Shields,] *Faithful Contendings Displayed: Being an Historical Relation of the State and Actings of the Suffering Remnant of the Church of Scotland*, ed. John Howie, Glasgow, John Bryce, 1780, first pagination sequence, p. 374.
54. *Ibid.*, first pagination sequence, p. 375.
55. *The National Covenant and Solemn League & Covenant; with the Acknowledgement of Sins, and Engagement to Duties: as they were Renewed at Lesmahago, March 3. 1688* [Edinburgh, 1689], p. 33.
56. [Shields,] *op. cit.*, first pagination sequence, p. 380.
57. *National Covenant and Solemn League & Covenant*, ed. cit., p. 32.
58. Robert Wodrow, *Analecta: or, Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences*, 4 vols, Edinburgh, Maitland Club, 1842-1843, I, p. 188.
59. The amendments are indicated in the text of the Covenants printed in *National Covenant and Solemn League & Covenant*, ed. cit., p. 37-50.
60. Most of the changes are marked in small font in the text of the Acknowledgement and Engagement in *ibid.*, p. 50-72.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
62. [Shields,] *op. cit.*, first pagination sequence, p. 381; R. Wodrow, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 188 (quotation).
63. A. Raffe, *Culture of Controversy*, *op. cit.*, p. 198-199; H. M. B. Reid, *A Cameronian Apostle: Being some account of John Macmillan of Balmaghie*, Paisley, A. Gardner, 1896; *Register of the Rev. John MacMillan, Being a Record of Marriages and Baptisms Solemnised by Him among the Cameronian Societies*, ed. Henry Paton, Edinburgh, Lorimer & Chalmers, 1908; W. McMillan, "The baptismal register of the Rev. John McMillan", *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 10, 1948-1950, p. 18-30.
64. For brief narratives, see Reid, *Cameronian Apostle*, p. 175-83; Matthew Hutchison, *The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland: Its Origin and History, 1680-1876*, Paisley, J. and R. Parlane, 1893, p. 163-167.
65. See A. Raffe, *Culture of Controversy*, *op. cit.*, p. 87-91.
66. The Acknowledgement had been in preparation as early as January 1709: National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh [hereafter NRS], CH3/269/1, Conclusions of the United Societies' general meeting, 1681-1724, p. 99, 101, 113, 115.
67. *The National Covenant, and Solemn League and Covenant with the Acknowledgement of Sins, and Engagement to Duties: As they were Renewed at Douglas July 24th 1712*, [Edinburgh?,] 1712, first pagination sequence, p. 6 (quotation), second pagination sequence, p. 19-68.
68. *Ibid.*, second pagination sequence, p. 53, 62.
69. See esp. Colin Kidd, "Conditional Britons: The Scots Covenanting Tradition and the Eighteenth-Century British State", *English Historical Review*, 117, 2002, p. 1147-1176.
70. *National Covenant*, ed. cit. (1712), first pagination sequence, p. 4, 10.
71. *Ibid.*, first pagination sequence, p. 5; NRS, CH3/269/2, Conclusions of the United Societies' general meeting, 1693-1724, p. 85; cf. above and *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, M.DC.XXXVIII.-M.DCCC.XLII*, Edinburgh, Church Law Society, 1843, p. 191.
72. *National Covenant*, ed. cit., (1712), p. 38-39; Wodrow, *Analecta*, II, p. 77-78.
73. See esp. Stephen G. Myers, *Scottish Federalism and Covenantalism in Transition: The Theology of Ebenezer Erskine*, Cambridge, James Clark & Co., 2015, see esp. ch. 3; Laurence A. B. Whitley, *A Great Grievance: Ecclesiastical Lay Patronage in Scotland until 1750*, Eugene, OR, Wipf & Stock, 2013, see esp. ch. 11; John M'Kerrow, *History of the Secession Church*, rev. edn., Glasgow, A. Fullarton, 1841.

74. *Acts of the Associate Presbytery; viz. I. Act concerning the Doctrine of Grace ... II. Act for Renewing the National Covenant of Scotland, and the Solemn League and Covenant*, Edinburgh, T. W. and T. Ruddimans, 1744, p. 91-96.
75. On the theological implications, see N. Myers, *op. cit.*, p. 182-192.
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ABSTRACTS

This article examines the swearing of collective religious covenants in early modern Scotland. Scotland's Covenants were public oaths in support of protestant beliefs and in favour of national

and individual Reformation. Though they shared some of the characteristics of the confessions of faith found across Europe, the Covenants were written in times of crisis and focused on doctrines of particular salience at the moment of composition. The article traces the origins of covenanting in the Scottish Reformation, before examining the Negative Confession of 1581, the National Covenant (1638) and the Solemn League and Covenant (1643). Because these oaths were sworn repeatedly, and on a national basis, they propagated the idea that Scotland was in covenant with God, and that this covenant should be periodically renewed. The Covenants also enshrined a notion of continuous Reformation: a process of constant striving for reform, and of perpetual vigilance against error and sin. When Scots again renewed the Covenants, nationally in 1648, and by a dwindling number of radical Presbyterians in 1666, 1689, 1712 and 1743, they were not commemorating the Reformation, but reaffirming its apparently timeless principles. Covenanting thus came to epitomize resistance to royal control over the church and then to the liberalizing tendencies within the Kirk.

Cet article se penche sur la pratique des serments d'alliance religieuse (*Covenants*) dans l'Ecosse moderne. Les covenants étaient des serments d'alliance publics, prêtés en défense de la foi protestante et pour promouvoir une Réforme tant nationale qu'individuelle. Si ces serments avaient des points communs avec les confessions de foi que l'on trouve partout en Europe à cette époque, ils avaient la particularité d'être employés en temps de crise et centrés sur les doctrines qui étaient au cœur des controverses du moment. Cet article retrace les origines de cette tradition écossaise, puis en présente les principaux avatars: la *Negative Confession* de 1581, le *National Covenant* de 1638 et le *Solemn League and Covenant* de 1643. Ces covenants, prêtés de manière répétée et à l'échelle nationale propagèrent l'idée que l'Ecosse était une nation en alliance avec Dieu et que ces serments devaient être régulièrement renouvelés. Les covenants ont aussi ancré l'idée que la Réforme était un processus continu: une quête incessante de perfectionnement et la promotion d'un état de perpétuelle vigilance contre le péché et l'erreur. Le covenant fut renouvelé en 1648 par la nation toute entière, puis par des groupes de plus en plus restreints de presbytériens radicaux en 1666, 1689, 1712 et 1743. Ces renouvellements successifs n'avaient pas de fonction commémorative mais constituent une réaffirmation de ces principes intemporels. La pratique des covenantaires en est alors venue à symboliser la résistance au contrôle du roi sur l'Eglise et à la mouvance libérale au sein de celle-ci.

INDEX

Keywords: Scotland; Reformation; presbyterianism; confession of faith; Covenants; oaths; worship; commemoration

Mots-clés: Ecosse, Réforme, presbytérianisme, confessions de foi, covenants, serments, rituel, commémoration.

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